STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Recent Developments in Northern Sri Lanka

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Now, the External Affairs Minister to reply to clarifications sought by Members on Statement made by him on Recent Developments in Northern Sri Lanka, on 4th December, 2009.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, I would like to thank all the hon. Members who participated in their effort to seek clarifications as to what the Government of India has been doing in terms of helping out the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. I was particularly benefited by the perspectives that hon. Members, Shri Venkaiah Naidu, Shri D. Raja, Shri Tiruchi Siva, Shri T.K. Rangarajan, Shri K. Malaisamy, Shri B.B. Tiwari and Shri Rajniti Prasad and others that were able to paint a picture as to how pitiable it is, how pathetic it is that the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka are going through.

Sir, in my Statement, I gave the figures as to some of the steps that the Sri Lankan Government has taken in terms of rehabilitating the 3,00,000 Tamil-speaking IDPs, internally displaced persons. But, the question is whether what they have done is enough. Well, I would certainly go along with the assessment that it is not enough. But, at the same time, we are dealing with a friendly country with which we have had traditionally cordial relations; and, in terms of our security also, Sri Lanka is a very important country.

I did give the figures as to how many of them are still in the camps. I am given to understand that there are about 1,00,000 IDPs still in the camps. I think, the effort is to resettle them also, or at least get them out of the camps so that they could go back to their villages, they could go back to their hamlets and seek a living there. As I have mentioned in my Statement, India is giving substantial assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction in northern Sri Lanka and it is our intention to continue to do so.

Doubts were expressed by some Members including Shri Tiruchi Siva, Shri Brij Bhushan Tiwari about whether our assistance was reaching the intended beneficiaries. Sir, Rs. 2.5 lakh family packages from Tamil Nadu were in fact, distributed through reputed international organisations like the International Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for refugees and we have received extremely positive feedback about their distribution and our timely help. Let me assure you that other projects being taken up by India are also being monitored closely and there are robust mechanisms existing for monitoring all Government projects taken up abroad. Let me submit that it is incorrect, as was suggested by some Members, particularly Dr. Malaisamy that we had taken up projects only in socalled Sinhalese areas. Sir, our engagement with Sri Lanka has increased to embrace a range of such projects in various parts of Sri Lanka, including the Northern and the Eastern provinces where India has been generous in extending assistance. I

would like to assure Shri Natchiappan that we are actively involved in improving the welfare of the Indian origin Tamils. We are also taking up projects to support the widows, the unfortunate widows. They have become widows because of the tragic turn of events that have taken place in Sri Lanka. Hon. Member, Shri Raja, did mention about our defence cooperation. Sir, Sri Lanka is a close neighbour with whom our security is intertwined. India regularly maintains defence cooperation with Sri Lanka. Such cooperation is premised on our national interest. It is incorrect to impute that the Government had actively aided the Government of Sri Lanka against the Tamil community in the conflict. Even during the conflict, the security and safety of the IDPs received our highest priority. Hon. Members might recall that we had consistently impressed upon the Sri Lankan Government to ensure the security of the IDPs to strictly adhere to no-fight zones and to extend safe passage to the civilians to come out of the conflict area and to pause hostilities to give a chance to the IDPs to escape from the conflict zone. Hon. Members, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu and Shri Tiruchi Siva and others have raised a question of human rights violation.

India condoned human rights violations regardless of where such violations take place. But, we would not like to politicise the issue, because it is very easy to politicise the human rights issues. We have taken up, whenever it has been brought to the notice of the Government of India, about human rights violations. We have always taken up with the Sri Lankan Government through diplomatic channels. I think, it is the unanimous opinion of this hon. House that the Sri Lankan Government, though victorious, as I said in the other House, the victors must be just and the weak protected. This is the *dharma* that we expect from the Sri Lankan Government. We have always conveyed to the Sri Lankan Government that it should, through a political process, settle the issue of Tamil minorities.

Sir, we are not stopping at the 13th Amendment. We want the Sri Lankan Government to go beyond the 13th Amendment. The political dialogue, which the Government of India expects Sri Lanka to involve itself, would be to find a permanent solution to this problem which is haunting Sri Lanka for quite some time.

Concerns have also been raised about the role of China, especially by Mr. Tiwari. Let me assure the hon. Members that we are confident about the strength of our ties with the Sri Lankan Government. And, our relations with Sri Lanka stand on its own and are not dependent on Sri Lanka's relations with a third country. Sri Lanka is aware of our security concerns and sensitivities and we hope they will continue to respond in a spirit of trust and understanding.

Hon. Shri Raja drew our attention to the plight of fishermen and Katchativu Island. Let me reiterate that the international maritime boundary line between India and Sri Lanka was settled by the Agreement of 1974 and 1976. The sovereignty over Katchativu Island is, now, according to

those Agreements, a settled matter. We do not propose to reopen or renegotiate this matter. However, the safety and security of fishermen are all utmost concern to the Government of India. Hence, we have proposed to the Sri Lankan Government that a Memorandum of Understanding on fishing cooperation with Sri Lanka is being attempted.

We have initiated the process, so that in the days to come we would be in a position to have an MoU with particular reference to the safety of fishermen, so that our fishermen, even if, by chance, go beyond our maritime territorial waters, are not harshly dealt with by the Sri Lankan Government. We are hoping that the Sri Lankan Government would see the rationale behind what we have proposed to them.

Some Members had talked about sending another Parliamentary delegation to Sri Lanka. Sir, the House may recall that at the invitation of the President of Sri Lanka to the hon. Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, a delegation did go there. I think, some Members from this House also had gone there. They have come back and submitted a report.

DR. V. MAITREYAN (Tamil Nadu): But that was not an official delegation. We wanted an all-Party political delegation.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is okay. Mr. Maitreyan, that point was taken up when you were not here.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: Sir, I did watch the proceedings. He is talking about a Parliamentary delegation.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You could not have participated by watching! Now, you cannot raise it again and again here.

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Members of Parliament went there.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: On their own!

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Members of Parliament went there on invitation. Is that okay?...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. V. MAITREYAN: Sir, Government of India cannot take a partisan stand on that. They did not go there on their own. *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maitreyan, I am afraid that I won't be able to allow any further clarification on clarifications.

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Anyway, some Members of Parliament belonging to some political parties went there on invitation, and it was not a Parliamentary delegation. But, nonetheless, they were hon. Members of this House. They did go to Sri Lanka. They did visit camps and they have come back with their impressions.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: And the report is not official still.

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Those impressions have been conveyed to the Prime Minister through their report...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. V. MAITREYAN: So, it is a personal communication.

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: In their report to the Prime Minister ...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. V. MAITREYAN: But the report has not been made public. It is a personal communication to the Prime Minister, not to the Parliament. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA (Tamil Nadu): If it has been addressed to the hon. Prime Minister, how can he call it personal? They are responsible Members of Parliament. *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maitreyan, if you want to...*(Interruptions)*... They had gone there. The Minister is giving clarification. Please. *(Interruptions)*

DR. V. MAITREYAN: They are responsible Members of Parliament, but the report has not been made public. It has not been tabled in the Parliament. As long as it is not tabled in the Parliament, it cannot be communicated. *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. It cannot be tabled in the Parliament. ... *(Interruptions)*

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Technically speaking, you are correct. The hon. Member is technically correct that the report, or whatever you may call it, has not been tabled in Parliament, but nonetheless, they have gone there and visited the camps, not one camp but a few camps.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: Sorry to interrupt you, Sir..*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, no. Mr. Maitreyan, I will not be...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. V. MAITREYAN: We want to know whether the opinion given in the report was unanimous or there were different...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maitreyan, you cannot get up without the permission of the Chair. You are a senior Member.

SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD (Bihar): Sir, with your permission...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let him complete.

SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Sir, I hope, you will appreciate that the Tamil problem is more political and less technical. I think, that important distinction requires to be made. The Tamil issue is more of a political than a technical issue.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: He did not say that; he told the Member that he was technically right.

SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Sir, I know that. The punch was for the consideration of the hon. Minister!

DR. V. MAITREYAN: Sir, my point is, one member of the delegation had given a different report. That is why, I would like to know whether it was a unanimous report or...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maitreyan, that is not the subject matter of discussion here.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: He has referred...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: He has referred to it during discussion on the Calling Attention Motion also. You were not present. You could have asked it then. A Member of your Party had participated. Please. *(Interruptions)* I am not allowing you; he has not completed.

SHRI D. RAJA (Tamil Nadu) : Sir, he has not completed. If you allow me, I would like to ask a few questions.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let us understand the rules. It was a *suo motu* Statement made by the hon. Minister. On that, it was decided that sufficient time would be given to the hon. Members to participate and seek clarification. Hon. Members took almost two hours for seeking clarifications. Now when the hon. Minister is giving replies to clarifications, I cannot open another debate and allow clarification on clarifications. I respect the hon. Members. The matter may be very sensitive but the House has its own business to do.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: It is as sensitive as Telangana. ..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is all right. Mr. Maitreyan, you need not remind us. ..*(Interruptions)*..

SHRI D. RAJA: I understand that and that is why I am asking this because the hon. Minister is again and again referring to that delegation and it was a delegation of a few parties. ..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Raja, please bear in mind that ..*(Interruptions)*.. I would like to recall, the Minister has made that as a part of his statement, then you could have raised that issue. ..*(Interruptions)*..

DR. V. MAITREYAN: But he is telling that. ..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maitreyan, you are trying to mislead the House. ..*(Interruptions)*..

DR. V. MAITREYAN: He mentioned about delegation; he mentioned about report. ..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maitreyan, it is not correct. While making the *suo motu* statement the hon. Minister has referred to the delegation, whatever it may be, that went there. At that time, you had sufficient time to question that. Again I will not allow the same thing to raise when it has already been raised, may not be by Maitreyan but others have raised it.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: He is telling the same old story. ..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please sit down. ..*(Interruptions)*.. Please sit down. ..*(Interruptions)*..

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA: What is this? ..*(Interruptions)*.. We are obliging but he is not. ..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have made it very clear, Mr. Siva. ..*(Interruptions)*.. I have made it clear. ..*(Interruptions)*..

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA: He is directing the Minister. ..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: He cannot. ..*(Interruptions)*.. Nobody can direct anybody. ..*(Interruptions)*..

DR. V. MAITREYAN: I cannot direct but I can point out. ..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Nothing will go on record what Mr. Maitreyan says unless he takes the permission of the Chair. ..*(Interruptions)* .. If the hon. Members are not allowing the Minister to complete and getting up in between, it is bad. ..*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, we are impressing upon the Sri Lankan Government for the political process of consultations with Tamil minorities there and then a durable solution to this problem keeping the Thirteenth Amendment in view and a formula, which would be acceptable to the minorities particularly the Tamil minorities, would be desirable. It would be in the interest of Sri Lanka and it would be in the interest of India so that this problem will not come to haunt that island country of Sri Lanka. I hope that they will be able to go through this political process. Thank you. ..*(Interruptions)*..

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU (Karnataka): Some important points remain to be answered. Normally, we do agree with you that this is a suo motu statement given by the hon. Minister. As an after-thought after we gave notice of Calling Attention..*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI D. RAJA: For Short Duration ..*(Interruptions)*..

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: For both Calling Attention and Short Duration, I am not going into the technicalities. Three points remained unanswered. One is that this is going on for years together. Since 1987, when late Shri Rajiv Gandhi*ji* was there, there was an agreement entered upon and both the Parliaments have ratified it. Afterwards, the 13th Constitution Amendment took place there. That has not been followed. What we are trying to impress upon the Government is what the Sri Lanka is telling us about what they are doing for devolution to see that the Tamils, the Muslims and other minorities also feel that they are part of the Government, part of the system and part of the Administration there. That question is not yet answered.

Secondly, the hon. Minister, in his general remarks, said, "A Parliamentary delegation has gone there."

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: He has clarified that point.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: I am coming to that. I am not finding fault with the DMK Party, or the Congress Party. Anybody can go. There is nothing wrong in that. But, my point is that the hon. Minister cannot quote it as an official visit and then say that Members have gone and they have given some report. So, naturally, the House would be interested to know if the Members have gone there and if they are satisfied about the conditions in the camps, about the resettlement. Okay. That is one argument. At least, we believe our hon. Members of Parliament.

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA: Why do you get carried away by media reports? Why don't you rely on the report given by... *(Interruptions)*.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, Mr. Siva, that is not the point.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: Sir, I do agree with Mr. Siva that we should not be carried away by the media reports. I will be happy if the 'Parliamentary delegation' which has gone there, which has given a report to the Prime Minister and the External Affairs Minister, if they can make available a copy to us, we will be more than happy. If not the Government, at least, the Members give us a copy so that we can also get enlightened because our impression, our feedback from the Island is that conditions there in camps are horrible, to say the least. This is not my opinion. It is also the opinion of the United Nations' human rights agencies. It is the opinion of the Red Cross. It is the opinion of lot of other people, who have gone there, and even Tamil MPs of that country also.

Sir, the last point is that it is a delicate issue, very sensitive issue. Sri Lanka is a friendly nation. We do not want to hurt Sri Lanka. We do not want to cause any discomfiture to Sri Lanka. We want to maintain best relations with Sri Lanka for variety of reasons including our ancestral, civilisational and historical bond. At the same time, they should reciprocate. My people are weeping there, they are dying there, and they are treated less than human beings. Being a neighbour and having a historical connection, it is our duty to express concern about the plight of those people. *(Time-bell rings)* And, the hon. Minister, I am sorry to say, has not given anything concrete, and now the minimum demand, that is made is, impress upon the Sri Lankan Government to have an all-party delegation of all Parliamentary parties, have a first-hand information on what is happening and let us be satisfied. If something good is happening, we will also be happy. After all, it is not Congress *versus* BJP, or DMK versus AIADMK. It is an issue concerning our people there in that country. Our persons of Indian origin also are there. I am not going to warn anybody, but I can say that it will have disastrous consequences if somebody concludes that LTTE is finished and the issue is over. If that is the conclusion you are going to reach, our friends in Sri Lanka reach, it will have a very negative effect and history will not excuse us.

So, I would like specific replies from the hon. Minister on what is going on regarding all-party delegation. Secondly, what is the stage of devolution of powers as agreed upon

by the hon. President Mahinda Rajapaksa? What is the information with the Government of India?

SHRI D. RAJA: I have only three questions. Will our Government ask the Sri Lankan Government pointedly to release the IDPs immediately and allow them to go back to their places of living? Number two, considering the friendly ties with the Sri Lanka, considering our wish that we want Sri Lanka to be secure and prosperous, considering all these things, will our Government ask Sri Lankan Government to expedite the political process in which the devolution of powers to Sri Lankan Tamils takes place? Thirdly, the Minister has mentioned about Kachchatheevu. You said that sovereignty is there. Now, we do not have sovereignty on that Island. Now, sovereignty lies with Sri Lanka. You are saying that access to Indian fishermen is available for rest and for drying the nets. If our fishermen do not have right to go there because we do not have sovereignty, how can they go and rest in Kachchatheevu Island? What is the point in going and resting in Kachchatheevu? And, our fishermen are not allowed to spread their nets around Kachchatheevu, what is the point in going there and trying to dry the nets? I do not understand this point. My question is: will the Government consider reopening of this agreement? You said, 'no'. But, I think, there is a need. Bilateral treaties can be reopened, can be renegotiated. No law prevents us from doing so. That is my understanding. Thank you.

SHRI T.K. RANGARAJAN (Tamil Nadu): Sir, I have three points. Sir, my first point is... ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. No. Not at all. *(Interruptions)* Please cooperate. *(Interruptions)* Mr. Maitreyan, please cooperate. *(Interruptions)* Whatever maybe the seriousness, please cooperate. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI T.K. RANGARAJAN: It was said that the displaced people would be sent to their homes within 180 days. Now, 180 days are going to be over. It is a sovereign country. It is a friendly country. What happened to that assurance? Second point is about the human rights violation. You have represented, or, you have said something, all those things are right. But nothing concrete has emerged. The violations are still there.

My third point, Sir, is about Katchatheevu agreement. You said that after 1974-76, it was over. After 1976 till 1983, our fishermen were able to catch fish in and around Katchatheevu. Nobody stopped them. Please consider the period from 1976 to 1983. Dispute started in Sri Lanka only after...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. Please put pointed questions. ...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI T.K. RANGARAJAN: Can you restore the position in which our fishermen were there up to 1983. It is a friendly country. Our friendship should not be... *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. No. Please don't go on elaborating....*(Interruptions)*

SHRI T.K. RANGARAJAN: Our friendship should be for human rights also. That is very important.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Now, Mr. Malaisamy. Please put only pointed question.

DR. K. MALAISAMY (Tamil Nadu): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No preface.

DR. K. MALAISAMY: I may not take more than two minutes. *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, no. No two minutes. Put only pointed question.

DR. K. MALAISAMY: Sir, I have three questions. *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Put pointed questions. *(Interruptions)* No preface and no foreword. *(Interruptions)*

DR. K. MALAISAMY: Sir, the Sri Lankan problem basically depends upon the rights and privileges envisaged in the Sri Lankan Constitution, which are being enjoyed by the Sri Lankan people. I would like to ask the Minister as to what is the strategy of the Government to see that our Sri Lankan Tamils have also the same rights and privileges to be extended to them. If so, can you afford to give a time-frame?

Secondly, Sir, as far as rehabilitation is concerned, the Minister has said in his statement and also in his reply that the rehabilitation process is going on. Are you able to give a time-frame, or, are you able to insist upon the Sri Lankan Government to do it within a time-frame ? This is my second question. Now, I come to my third question, the most important question, last question, final question. I want to endorse what Mr. Raja and Mr. Rangarajan... *(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Endorsement. Okay. It is over. ...*(Interruptions)*

DR. K. MALAISAMY: Sir, I am telling the hon. Minister that it is going to be a severe headache not only for now but it will be so till the problem of our Indian fishermen is solved. The problem of our fishermen is the real problem. It has to be solved some way or the other. You have to take it seriously. It has been rightly said about the 1974 agreement, the Chair knows it; the entire House knows it. ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please put pointed question. ...*(Interruptions)*... You say, fishermen problem. It is over. ...*(Interruptions)*

DR. K. MALAISAMY: Sir, the 1974 agreement should be nullified, and, Katchatheevu restored. That is one way of looking at it. If you are not doing that, I underline, if you are not doing that... *(Interruptions)*... What is the strategy to ensure that the Indian fishermen can freely go in for fishing from places like Rameshwaram, Ramanathapuram? Unless they go around Katchatheevu, into deep waters, they cannot earn their livelihood. Whatever law you are going to enact today, it will be violated, consciously or unconsciously. So, please find a permanent solution.

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA: The issue does not end with resettling the IDPs who are in camps. As I said the other day, moving out of camps does not amount to resettlement. Even if the Government of India takes initiative and after that they resettle, the war might have been said to be over, but the reasons still remain the same. The Tamil people who are there should have the legitimate rights they are asking for and the Government of India should see that the constitutional rights which they deserve should be given to them.

Secondly, Katchatheevu problem is not just about the Indian fishermen. As the hon. Minister himself said, Sri Lanka is an area in the southern end of India, and from the security point of view, Katchatheevu must be taken into consideration very seriously. As he said, it cannot be reopened, as the issue of sovereignty is settled with Sri Lanka. The rights, which have been ensured to the Tamil fisherman, of going around Katchatheevu, drying their nets, and others, have not been given to them till date. I would ask the Government to see that the genuine rights of Indian fishermen should be restored to them and you should also take this into consideration from the security point of our country.

DR. E.M. SUDARSANA NATCHIAPPAN (Tamil Nadu): Whether the Government will take into confidence the fisherman federation before going for MoU and during the process of MoU.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: Sir, one line.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Dr. Maitreyan, however genuine your question may be, I don't want to create new precedents. *(Interruptions)*

DR. V. MAITREYAN: Sir, I am affected..*(Interruptions)*..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You are not affected. *(Interruptions)* Don't say that. *(Interruptions)*

DR. V. MAITREYAN: Sir, I am from affected State. *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Your party has been given the opportunity. *(Interruptions)* Please. *(Interruptions)* Okay, only one line.

DR. V. MAITREYAN: Sir, *

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: This is not related to the matter. *(Interruptions)* I am not allowing that. *(Interruptions)* I am not allowing that. *(Interruptions)* I am removing that. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Let me first address the clarification sought by the hon. Member, Shri Venkaiah Naidu. Mr. Venkaiah Naidu's position is that India should insist on devolution of powers. Well, we are entirely going along with that proposition. That is what we have been doing all the time, and we will continue to do so. About delegation, Sir, here, I would like the House to

* Not recorded.

3.00 P.M.

seriously consider the situation in which we are placed. The Presidential Election is going to take place in Sri Lanka in the end of January. I think the polling date is fixed for the end of January. Now, would this time be appropriate for a Parliamentary Delegation from this country to Sri Lanka? I would leave this decision to the wisdom of the House. Personally, I don't think that this would have been an appropriate time for us to think in terms of sending a delegation.

Hon. Member, Shri Raja, raised three queries. He wanted IDPs to go out of camps. I think the Government of India has been insisting on the Sri Lankan Government for that. Somebody mentioned about 180 days. I think within 180 days they should be out of camps, so that they could get back to their villages, to their familiar surroundings. This is the concern of the Government of India. And we will continue to impress upon the Sri Lankan Government through our channels that they should go through this process.

Next is the political process. I think it should be expedited. I entirely agree with you that the political process has to be expedited.

That would only provide a lasting solution to this ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. I think, that will be helpful to Sri Lanka also. Shri Rangarajan mentioned about 180 days. Well, we insist on 180 days. The time is running out. As we run a Government here, they also run a Government there and I can imagine the kind of problems that they would be facing. So, within the constraints of the Government that are placed there, we will continuously insist on the 180- day deadline. Mr. Malaisamy mentioned about equal status. Yes, the Tamilian minorities in Sri Lanka should be equal citizens along with Sinhalese. I think, that is Government of India's proposition. We entirely agree with that. We go along with that and insist on that. Then, the fishermen's problem. Sir, one suggestion has come from our friend, Mr. Natchiappan. I think, the fishermen's federation has to be taken into consideration. They should be taken into confidence. I think, I am inclined to go along with this suggestion which has been made by Mr. Natchiappan. We will sound them out and see if we can get into an MoU so that there could be a permanent basis. But, the only problem is Katchatheevu. One of the hon. Members mentioned that agreement should be abrogated. Well, if an agreement between two sovereign countries has to be abrogated, then, there should be some reasons. ...*(Interruptions)* Well, short of re-opening that, we are negotiating so that our fishermen could be helped out. This is the time for both countries to find a creative solution to put in place institutional arrangements for regularising fishing activities by our fishermen in these waters. So, we will work towards this objective of helping the fishermen.

Sir, with these explanations, I am sure that the purpose for which I made my *suo motu* statement would have been served.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: I am not asking any question or going to do anything like that. I would like to submit to the House and to the countrymen that we are very unhappy the way in which Sri Lanka is responding to the situation. We are also equally unhappy with the Government of India's attitude because mere sympathetic words are not going to solve the problem. The hon. Minister said, "I leave it to the wisdom of the Parliament". I feel that this is the right time for Members of Parliament to visit, see the situation themselves, come back and then discuss with the Government of India. I lodge a protest about the inaction on the part of the Indian Government. ...*(Interruptions)*

GOVERNMENT BILL

The Central Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2009

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI KAPIL SIBAL): Sir, I beg to move:

That the Bill to amend the Central Universities Act 2009, as passed by Lok Sabha, be taken into consideration.

Sir, the Government of India, the UPA Government, over the years, has been emphasising not just on the expansion of higher education, but also improving the quality of higher education and to remove the regional imbalances that have occurred over the years. As you are aware, there were several States which did not have a Central University and there were demands from some States that the State Universities should be upgraded into Central Universities. And it is unthinkable that in a country like India, large State should not have a Central University. So, to actually remove the regional imbalances, we decided through the Central Universities Ordinance 2009 which is promulgated by the President on the 15th of January 2009 the conversion of some State Universities into Central Universities in the State of Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh, and by deciding to establish 12 new Central Universities, Jammu and Kashmir was one such State where we decided to establish Central University. Now, the methodology that has been followed by the Government of India is that the State gives to the Government of India free of cost 500 acres of land. Then we have set up within the Government of India a Site Selection Committee. When the particulars of the lands are given to us, normally there is a choice given. The Site Selection Committee actually visits various States, comes back and gives a report, and on the basis of that, we take a decision as to what would be most appropriate.

Now, in some States, the sites were given. But in the case of Jammu and Kashmir, they told us that there are 3 sites in Jammu that they wanted to be considered for the setting up of a Central University, but they never gave us any particulars. In the meantime, the previous UPA